



Zookeeper Interview – Reptiles

First Name & Title: Troy - Reptile Zookeeper

How did you become a zookeeper?

I knew I wanted to be a Zookeeper when I was two years old. I attended summer safari at the Denver Zoo every year that I could; I even lied about my age one year, so I could attend an extra year. I then became a teen volunteer and volunteered for 7 years, putting in over 2,000 hours. From there I started interning in various departments throughout the zoo. Finally, after 9 years of volunteering/interning with Denver Zoo and graduating from Pikes Peak Community College with a degree in Zookeeping Technology, I was able to obtain my dream job of being a reptile keeper at Denver Zoo.

What education and/or training did you need for this job/career?

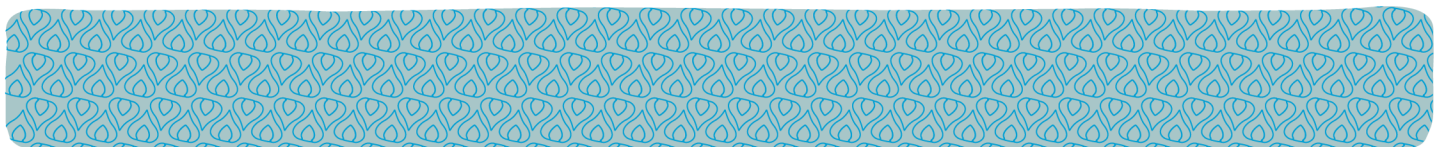
I graduated from Pikes Peak Community College in Colorado Springs with their degree in Zookeeping Technology. During my years there, I attended various courses including; reptile husbandry, fish husbandry, mammal husbandry, bird husbandry, animal behavior, animal training, veterinary zookeeping, and exhibit design. I also attended various career development classes at Denver Zoo.

What is the daily routine like for a zookeeper?

Now I would not say being a zookeeper is for everyone, because it involves a lot of poop; but I do get to do some amazing things. Most of my day involves feeding animals, and I have to say feeding a Komodo dragon 20 pounds of meat is pretty awesome, and feeding a Gaboon viper (a venomous snake with the longest fangs in the world) can be quite the adrenalin rush. I also do things like water changes for turtles, make fruit fly cultures to feed to our poison dart frogs, feed hundreds of bats, and do water chemistry tests on our Lake Titicaca frogs. However, in the end it all comes back to cleaning enclosures and picking up poop.

What is the hardest part of your job?

The hardest part of my job is probably dealing with all the smelly stuff. Animals poop a lot, so getting past the smell can be quite the task, but trust me when I say; "It's worth it".





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What is the best part of your job?

My favorite part of my job is getting to come to the zoo every day and working with such incredible species. I love getting the opportunity to educate people about the misunderstood animals in my building. Reptiles are beautiful creatures, and if you take the time to observe them and learn about them, you will see how truly amazing they really are.

What type of diet do you feed the animals in your care?

Most of the animals in my building eat insects, rodents, and salad. For example, our Frilled lizard eats crickets, cockroaches, and super worms. Our giant anaconda eats large rabbits, and our tiny Egyptian tortoises love their greens.

What is the most beneficial class you took in high school or college to prepare for this career?

In High school, I was in honors biology. In college, I took animal behavior and reptile husbandry. These classes really help me in many ways as a zookeeper here at Denver Zoo.

What advice would you give someone wanting/trying to work in this field?

Dedication! Becoming a Zookeeper is a challenging process, and this is a very competitive field. Most people that become zookeepers love their jobs so much they rarely leave it. This leads to not many available jobs. My first bit of advice is to be willing to move. Keepers usually have to start off at other facilities before they end up at the zoo they ultimately want to work at. Second bit of advice is apply for internships. You can never gain too much knowledge and experience. Try to choose a taxa of animals you want to work with and travel the world doing internships at a lot of different Zoos. Third bit of advice is to network. The Zookeeper community is a very tight knit community. Get to know as many people as you can, and make a name for yourself. Sometimes it's not what you know, but who you know.

